

Delegation Backs Maine's Request to Continue Providing Prescription Drugs to Most Vulnerable

Wednesday, February 15 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today U.S. Senators Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME) and Susan Collins (R-ME), and U.S. Representatives Tom Allen (D-ME) and Mike Michaud (D-ME) urged Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Michael Leavitt to accept Maine's petition to participate in the Medicare 402 Demonstration Waiver, as well as the State's request to extend repayment provisions to March 8, 2006. This would allow the state to continue to act to ensure that low income individuals receiving prescription drugs through Medicare Part D will receive their full prescription benefits and would assure that Maine will be compensated for its costs.

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"Maine must be able to continue providing this vital safety net," said Maine's congressional delegation in a joint statement. "While substantial progress has been made in the implementation of the benefit, thousands of Mainers with limited resources are still encountering difficulty in obtaining the assistance they should receive. These most vulnerable citizens must be protected while implementation problems are fully addressed. We must ensure that no one is denied their essential medicine."

When the new drug benefit went into effect on January 1st, many low-income seniors were unable to get their prescription drugs or were charged huge co-payments due to errors made by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

LETTER FROM THE DELEGATION

The Honorable Michael Leavitt

Secretary

U.S.
Department of Health & Human Services

200
Independence Avenue, S.W.

Washington,
D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We are writing to express our strong and enthusiastic support for the request submitted by the State of Maine to participate in the Medicare 402 Demonstration Waiver, as well as the State's request to extend repayment provisions to March 8, 2006.

We are pleased to see the improvements which have been made in implementing the Medicare prescription drug benefit, yet approximately 15,000 Maine beneficiaries continue to encounter difficulty in obtaining the coverage to which they are entitled. Currently many individuals eligible for the Low Income Subsidy (LIS) are still not properly identified. It is essential that all those who were assured of low income assistance, whether as dual eligibles or LIS-eligible, will receive their vital medications without interruption. Our state is assuring that each receives the Part D coverage to which they are entitled, and will process payments only as a payer of last resort.

Maine led the nation in ensuring that beneficiaries would be protected from harm. The burden which our state, our pharmacies, and indeed our beneficiaries have borne must be relieved. At the same time, we must not remove a vital safety net

prematurely. No beneficiary should leave a pharmacy without their medications.

It is with this commitment in mind that we lend our wholehearted support to this application. Thank you for your time and consideration.